Carried

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by lurkinglurkerwholurks

Summary

Tim's mom was dead. It was Christmas Eve.

Created to fill hollyhock13's BatFam Christmas Stocking prompt "Janet Drake’s funeral was canonically held on Christmas Eve :)" because it was evil and I couldn't resist.

——Can be read as a standalone——

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

He should be crying. That's what you're supposed to do at a funeral. Especially your mom's. But he wasn't. He hadn't. Not once.

Tim stared, dry-eyed, at the minister's shoes. They were shiny but mud-flecked, a consequence of the walk through the cemetery to the grave. The earth beneath their feet was cold and hard, but it had slurried the night before and made a mess of the grounds. His mother would have hated it. She would have worn impractical stiletto heels, despite the cold and the terrain, and would have grumbled the entire way from the car. But she didn't. As the guest of honor, she was carried instead.

The minister was still speaking. Tim tried to listen, he really did, but he couldn't make his mind focus. The man had been hired by Jack Drake. He was an accessory, a traditional service fixture, a performer meant to fill out the facade. The Drakes weren't church people, and the paunchy, grey-haired man at the front knew nothing of the woman he had been paid to eulogize.

That was okay. He had been kind to Tim, his hand warm and dry as they shook before the service. He had asked how Tim was doing and seemed to hear all the things he didn't say. The minister might not have known Janet Drake, but when he spoke, his voice was full of warmth and gentle compassion. Besides, Tim hadn't really known her either. In fact, of the mourners present, he probably knew her the least.

The lawn behind him was filled with the elite of Gotham. Janet's socialite friends and Jack's business connections stood clumped in little groups, all dressed attractively in black. The men had pumped Jack's hand and roughly clapped Tim's shoulder. The women had cooed over Tim or ignored him. Most had subtly flirted with Jack, resting delicate hands on his arm or staring up doe-eyed through thick eyelash extensions. Jack's separation from his wife was common knowledge, and none seemed put off by the platinum-handled coffin sitting only yards away.

Tim wanted to pay attention. He wanted this day to *mean* something. Janet Drake had been a stranger, but she was still his mom. She was still a person. Someone should mourn her. Someone here should care.

Next to him, Jack Drake stood straight and still. He didn't sniff or wipe his eyes. He didn't put his arm around his son or tell him that everything would be alright. He just stood there, eyes fixed on nothing

in particular. Jack had loved his wife at one point, Tim knew. They'd loved each other even when they hadn't loved him. But it had been a very long time ago, and they had both moved on.

In his head, Tim heard the Tatooine stormtroopers squawking "Move along, move along" and choked down an irreverent laugh. Everyone was moving along. Janet Drake had passed four days ago, and already things were changing.

Jack had returned to Gotham, stepping foot in his home for the first time in weeks. Always a force of nature, he had swept through the house like a mudslide, putting together the service and funerary arrangements over the phone even as he boxed and bagged his wife's belongings to donate. Tim had pulled himself off patrol, unsure how to explain his absence to his father, but the precaution had been unnecessary. They had spoken twice, once when Jack had arrived the day after his wife's death, and again the morning of the funeral, when Jack had told his son that he would be catching a flight after the service.

Jack had a life back in Tokyo, with a company to run and a girlfriend who was waiting for him to return. A life that didn't accommodate him returning to Gotham any more frequently than he had before. A life that didn't include Tim. That was okay. It had to be okay. Though Tim's parents traded off to be home for him in name, neither had truly been there for him in years, physically or emotionally. This new life, he tried to tell himself, would feel no different.

It had begun to snow. Tiny specks of white drifted to earth, landing on the shiny lid of the coffin as it was slowly lowered into the ground. Tim blinked away the cold flecks that landed on his eyelashes. He was cold. His outsides were cold, and his insides were cold, all the way down to the empty, gnawing pit in his stomach. He thought of the walk back to the car next to his father, together but not touching, not speaking. He thought of entering his house, quiet, empty, and lonely. He shivered.

The service ended. He and Jack tossed a couple of handfuls of ceremonial dirt atop the coffin, then wiped their hands on their slacks. The workers would come by later and fill in the hole. For now, it would collect snow. The minister stepped down from the front, shook Jack's hand, shook Tim's, and wished them well. Tim missed his warmth the moment he stepped away.

Tim kept his eyes on his shoes as they walked to the car. The other

mourners waited on either side, sometimes speaking a farewell or condolence, but not getting in their way. No one wanted to linger in the cold. Perversely, Tim wished they would. He wished he had a few more seconds to adjust to the idea of leaving Janet behind. Shouldn't it have been an indelible moment for him, seeing his mother disappear beneath the earth? She had cradled him, once upon a time. Shouldn't it mean more to watch her go? He cringed away from the idea of feeling pain, but surely pain was preferable to this icy numbness.

"Jack."

Jack stopped walking at the sound of his name, so Tim stopped as well. He lifted his head and blinked up through the softly falling flakes.

"Bruce Wayne." Jack sounded surprised as he shook Bruce's hand. "Thanks for coming."

He was right to be surprised. The Waynes and the Drakes were neighbors, but not friends, barely even acquaintances, and Bruce was too busy, too powerful, to waste time at a service like this. Yet here he was, looking down at them both in his tasteful Armani suit.

"Of course. Our condolences on your loss." Bruce's gaze flicked over to Tim, searching for... What? Something Tim couldn't give, most likely. Trauma akin to Bruce's own? But this wasn't a brutal alley murder. It was... It just was.

"Thank you." Jack dredged up a thin smile, then seemed to remember his manners. "This is my son, Tim." He settled a hand on Tim's shoulder, the fingers long and thin like Tim's own.

Inwardly, Tim cringed, but if Bruce was nonplussed, he didn't show it. "Yes. Tim's spent some time at my house while you've been abroad. He's been a big help with some little projects I've been working on with my boy."

Bruce gestured behind him. "You remember my ward, Dick."

Dick, dressed in a slightly less expensive suit than Bruce's, stepped forward and shook Jack's hand. He and Bruce stood the same way when at rest. Tim wondered if they knew.

"Hey, Tim," Dick murmured. His gaze was too warm, too sympathetic. Tim returned a mumbled hello and looked away.

“I feel horribly gauche to ask this, Jack, here and now, but I was wondering if we could borrow Tim for the afternoon.”

Bruce had taken Jack by the elbow and guided the man away, but Tim could still hear them. Perhaps he had been meant to. Bruce was doing a subdued version of his Brucie—charming, a little dense, benignly selfish. It must mean Bat business. Urgent, if Bruce and Dick had both come. Tim tried to straighten his shoulders and ready himself. He could be ready, if Bruce needed him. But the wind whipped through the crowd, and he hunched over again, shivering.

“Geez, Timbo.” Dick took off his coat and wrapped it around Tim.

“M’fine,” Tim mumbled.

Bruce was still talking, voice lower now, saying that a wake was no place for a boy. That was smart. Jack cared about appearances and would want his son at the house, but if Bruce could give him a reason, he’d be more than happy to be rid of Tim for a bit.

Dick was saying something about the cold, about Tim’s loss. Bruce was talking about his own parents. Tim was trying to jolt his sluggish brain into piecing together what the emergency could be.

Bruce got his way, of course. Once the issue of propriety was settled, helped along by a dash of that old Gotham guilt over poor orphan Bruce, it was simple enough to steal Tim away. They took him back to their car, a stately standard limousine that Tim hadn’t seen before, Bruce on his right and Dick on his left. Alfred met them at the car and opened the door. His eyes were kind, like the minster’s.

Tim waited until the limo had pulled down the cemetery’s long drive before asking, “What’s the mission?”

He found he was looking forward to the case, as much as the detached feeling behind his ribs could let him look forward to anything. Having something to focus on might help. Being able to move might shake some of the frost from his limbs.

Bruce and Dick exchanged a look that Tim couldn’t decipher. They looked so alike, despite not being related. What must it feel like to be able to look at another person and understand what they were thinking without a word spoken? What did it feel like to have your soul be that close to another’s?

“Mission?” Bruce repeated. His voice sounded strange.

Tim nodded. Was it that dangerous, then? That awful?

“There’s no mission, Tim.” Dick was speaking slowly, picking his way through his words. “We thought… Did you not want to leave?”

“There’s no mission?” Tim lifted one hand, brushed the limp hair from his eyes. “Then why are you here?”

“Because your mother died.”

It wasn’t that Tim had never heard Bruce speak with such tender softness. As terrifying as he could be, Batman had been known to crouch down in front of the smallest, most frightened child and lure them out by his voice alone. But Tim wasn’t sure why Bruce was speaking that way to him, or why it made something inside him begin to tremble.

“We wanted to be there for you, and you looked like you needed rescuing.” Dick’s eyes were bright and trained unblinkingly on Tim. “Were we wrong?”

Oh. Something deep in Tim’s chest sparked, an ember flaring weakly in the dark. They had come for him. Not for Robin, not for a mission, but for *him*. Then he winced, dreading their judgement of the truth he had to tell.

“I’m fine,” Tim murmured, his voice muffled in the car’s interior. “Thank you both for… for coming. But it’s different for me than it was for you. Janet… she wasn’t…”

Tim’s slender fingers picked at the stitching on the cuff of Dick’s overcoat, still slung around his shoulders. They needed to know. They needed to know what an awful person he was. And if it lost him Robin, so be it. At least they would know.

“I haven’t cried. Not once. And I don’t know that I will. I don’t even know that I’ll miss her. She was supposed to stay with me, but she was never home. I think she forgot I lived there sometimes.” Tim’s lips twisted. “It’s stupid, but I keep thinking… This is the first Christmas Eve I can remember that I know where they both are.”

He looked up and searched their faces, not sure how to interpret what he saw. Dick looked horrified, a fact that churned his gut, but Bruce’s face was as still and smooth as ever. Tim looked down.

“Come here.” When Tim didn’t move, Bruce spoke again. “Tim. Come

here.”

The car was still moving, but Tim unbuckled and rose in a crouch, shifting from his bench seat to the spot between Bruce and Dick. After settling and rebuckling, he looked up at Bruce, jaw tight as he awaited his lecture.

No lecture came. Instead, an arm clad in soft Italian silk and smelling of aftershave and musky cologne reached around Tim and settled onto his shoulders. On his other side, Dick rested his hand on Tim’s, covering Tim’s numbed fingers with his own, calloused ones.

“You’ll stay with us tonight,” Bruce said. “Dick isn’t on shift in Bludhaven for another two days. Your room is already prepared. I’ll clear it with your father, and we’ll have you back in time to celebrate Christmas with him.”

“He won’t care,” Tim assured them. “Jack’s headed back to Tokyo tonight.”

Another silence spread through the car, one timed to the twitching pulse in Bruce’s jaw. Tim didn’t understand it, but he was pretty sure that it wasn’t his fault this time.

“We’ll talk about that tomorrow.” There was a pause, another unspoken communication over Tim’s head. “Or maybe the day after.”

Bruce’s fingers threaded through Tim’s hair, rubbing against the back of his skull, sending tendrils of warmth unfurling through the numbness.

“There is no right way to grieve,” Bruce murmured. “Or any timeline for it to start.”

“You were here for us when we needed you,” Dick agreed. “We’ll be here for you. Whatever that looks like. We’re a team, no matter what.”

Bruce didn’t verbally agree, but he gave Tim’s shoulders a gentle squeeze, and Tim found himself tipping over until his head rested against the delicately woven fabric of Bruce’s suit.

“Rest while you can,” Bruce advised, his chest rumbling beneath Tim’s cheek. “Alfred has been baking all day. You’ll need your strength.”

“We’ll wake you when we get to the Manor,” Dick promised.

Tim nodded and curled his fingers around Dick's as he closed his eyes. It was wrong, he was pretty sure, to feel this happy while riding away from his mother's funeral. The tears might never come, or they might appear later and drown him in their strength. But no matter what happened, it was nice to know he had people to carry him through. It was almost like having a real family.

End Notes

FYI, Dick later references this scene (& ones later in this series) in The Return: https://archiveofourown.org/works/23726839

2025 ETA: I've started posting "behind the scenes" looks at the process of writing fics over on Tumblr. Here's the one for this fic: https://lurkinglurkerwholurks.tumblr.com/post/730999516696870912/carried

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!